

James Monroe to Andrew Jackson, December 12, 1819, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

PRESIDENT MONROE TO JACKSON.

Washington, December 12, 1819.

Dear Sir, I have intended for sometime past to write you fully in reply to several letters which I have received from you, but the pressure of my duties here has prevented it. On my return from the westward, I had much to attend to, which had been delayd by my absence, and then the preparation for the meeting of Congress succeeded, and now the calls from that body, give me little time for my friends.

I sent you a copy of the message, which will shew you the actual state of our affairs with Spain. In declining to ratify the treaty, the King declard his intention to send a minister here, which he repeated, on the return back to cadiz of the hornet. but yet no minister has arriv'd. We are told that he is probably on his way, and may be expected in the course of this month, or the next.¹ There is in truth no calculation, in this, or any other respect, on what the Spanish govt. may do. In regard to its conduct in declining to ratify the treaty, we are satisfied that the three powers mentiond in the message, are with us; but, should we take a step leading to war, we cannot count on them, and such is the pride and folly of the Spanish govt., that it is to be apprehended, should we take any measure, to afford a pretext, it would declare war, in which event, adventurers from every country, particularly G. Britain, would, under the Spanish flag, be let loose on our commerce. We are warnd from the best sources, that altho the British govt. has acted fairly in regard to the ratification, it would not be averse to see a war between the Ustates and Spain, in the expectation that it would throw the whole carrying trade into her hands, and cripple our

Library of Congress

commerce to her advantage. From Spain we have nothing to fear, but from such a state of things, we sho'd sustain great loss, and could not possibly gain any glory, as we have it in our power to take Florida when we please, and can take it, at any time, without much, if any fighting.

1 The new envoy, Don Francisco Dionisio Vives, successor of Onis, did not present his credentials till Apr. 12, 1820.

By such a state, our revenue would be much diminished, and we probably be forc'd, to impose, direct taxes. I suggested, therefore, the propriety of passing a law, authorising the taking Florida, but suspending its operation, to give an opportunity, for the reception of this minister during the session of congress. I have believd that this would be the surest way, to force Spain, into the performance of her duty, or in case she faild still to do it, to secure the good wishes of other powers on our side, and also to unite our own country, in decisive measures against her. What Congress may do, it is not in my power to say; no proposition can be made, which will not be opposed. Some opinion, however, of the result, may, soon be formd. I well know that the more decisive Congress are, the more certain shall we be, to extort from Spain, what we are entitled to, and without war. Till this business is settled, I should be very sorry to see you with draw from the service. Your aid in concluding it, may, and will be eminently useful; and knowing, as the Spanish govt. does, the promptitude and decision with which you will act, I think that it will have much influence in preventing war.

I do not think that the report of the senate will be taken up at all.² The decision of the H. of Representatives disposed of the question, and there it will I presume rest. . . .

2 Refers to the report of Lacock's committee on the Seminole campaign. It was before the people—and the same was true of Jackson's reply. It was decided to leave them as they were. See pp. 410, n. 2, 416, n. 3, *ante*.